

CHAPTER FOUR: Irenaeus and the Christus Victor Soteriology

A. Introduction

Discussing Christ's saving work, Gustaf Aulén proposes three major figures around whom his presentation centers: Irenaeus, Anselm and Luther. In this chapter, we turn to an analysis of Aulén's use of Irenaeus and the developing soteriology of the early Church as expressed primarily in Irenaeus' principal theological contribution, the Adversus Haereses.¹

As he begins chapter two of Christus Victor, Aulén indicates why he has chosen Irenaeus as a starting point: Irenaeus' teaching is quite close to the Apostolic age;² he is the earliest Church Father to give a clear treatment of the atonement from various points of view; and he fixes the lines on which Christian thought is to move for centuries.³ This selection of Irenaeus reflects likewise Aulén's theological background.⁴

Commenting on the development of atonement ideas in the early Church, Hastings Rashdall's The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology examines the importance of Irenaeus' soteriological presentation.⁵ Irenaeus, according to Rashdall, was "the first of the Fathers who holds the theory of an objective redemption" and "the first writer who may be said definitely to have conceived the idea of a dogmatic theology as distinct from an apologetic philosophy."⁶ While

Aulén's own interpretation of Irenaeus and his theological contribution concurs with Rashdall's latter affirmation, Aulén explicitly dismisses Rashdall's observation that Irenaeus' theory of an objective redemption approximates "the idea of substitution."⁷ This statement in Rashdall's lectures illustrates a recurring difficulty encountered by Aulén: the identification of objective atonement with substitution or satisfaction theories.

Aulén, therefore, deliberately chooses Irenaeus to demonstrate that the classic view of atonement already found in the soteriology of this second century Patristic writer needs neither to be identified with rationalistic atonement presentations nor to be discounted because of the devil or ransom imagery contained therein. Aulén's presentation of Irenaeus in Christus Victor seeks to establish the following significant points:

1. Irenaeus' soteriology is one of struggle and victory; hence the victory motif appears as valid;
2. the later rationalistic and substitutionary notions of atonement are not to be found here;
3. Irenaeus' imagery is restrained; nevertheless, the future development of such imagery does not invalidate the basic "classic" idea of struggle and victory;
4. the idea of a "physical" or "natural" redemption of mankind by Jesus in assuming the human condition does not adequately convey the reality of man's salvation;
5. Irenaeus' use of the concept ἀνακεφαλαιώσεως (recapitulatio) relates directly to a soteriology of conflict and victory.

In sum, Aulén analyzes the thought of Irenaeus as the first genuine soteriological presenter of the Patristic era with a view to finding support for his own proposition of the classic idea of Christ's redemptive mission.

The background of Irenaeus' Adversus Haereses is that of pastoral polemic whereby this early theologian attempts to discredit the Gnosticism loose in his age.⁸ Irenaeus' exposition comprises five books: Book I exposes certain of the Gnostic doctrines; Book II presents a refutation based primarily on reasoning; Book III concentrates on the teaching of the Church; Book IV treats of the Lord's words; and Book V is concerned with mistaken interpretations of Paul's letters and the problem posed by the resurrection of the flesh. Reading this historic treatise, one recognizes the dominant characteristics of this movement which posed a lethal threat to second century Christianity: creation is placed in an emanation structure; material existence is depicted as evil; the God of the Old Testament differs from the God of the New; the Christ did not suffer truly. Dualism and docetism characterize the essence of all Gnostic thought.⁹ From Irenaeus' pastoral polemic emerges a soteriological presentation of lasting importance for subsequent Christian theology. As Rashdall asserts, the challenge of Gnosticism had forced the orthodox teachers of the Church to reply to their heretical objections and in this set of circumstances, a theology of atonement came to birth.¹⁰ Gustaf Aulén's exposition of a classic view of

atonement necessarily begins here; he himself appreciates this fact and initiates his Christus Victor analysis by discussing Irenaeus.

B. Irenaeus' God-image

Exposing the Gnostic false knowledge, Irenaeus delineates his picture of God. The first obvious fact about the God-image to strike the reader of Adversus Haereses is Irenaeus' forceful denial of any separation between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament who is the Father of Jesus. Irenaeus' opponents, on the contrary, declare that the God figure of the Old Testament differs from the Father of Jesus Christ and is the product of a defect in an emanation structure.¹¹ Irenaeus' insistence on the unity of God appears throughout the entire treatise. This God made all things and remains the same in both covenants.¹² He is the being from whom all men will receive judgment and their due recompense; Irenaeus further stresses that such judgment will take place in the flesh, a concept contrary to Gnostic dualism.¹³ While certain variations exist among Irenaeus' adversaries on this question, there emerges a clear, universal trend of a dichotomy between the one God and the other. Bitterly opposing the Gnostics, Irenaeus' affirmation of the unicity of God occupies a pivotal place in his work, and one particularly notices this stress in the first two books of Adversus Haereses.

In responding to the exaggerations of second century Gnosticism, Irenaeus emphasizes that the Christian picture of God presents no such division. The author of Christus Victor likewise wishes to refrain from supporting any theological structure which utilizes this mistaken notion. Aulén perceives such a distorted, split God-image in the primitive redemption presentations which crudely exhibit divine appeasement. The scenario develops in a rudimentary manner. It is a loving God who creates man to increase and to grow in his likeness. Evil enters the scene and blocks the creature's progress. This divine being is now displeased and angered; his gifts are cut off; he must be satisfied. The face of God then becomes not that of a loving Father, but of a ruler who must be reconciled with his subject. Hence, God appears in a certain sense as split - on the one hand, there is a loving and generous God; on the other, a God who no longer gives but rather awaits a restoration of the proper balance from those who have offended him. Obviously, a discontinuity exists here not only in the picture or image of God that accompanies these characterizations, but also in the divine work itself. God's image changes from benevolence to displeasure; the activity from giving to being appeased. Such a description does not belong to Irenaeus; God continues in his benevolence and gracious kindness. It is true that he is angered and in conflict with evil; but as Irenaeus asserts, the anger and the conflict is not with God's own creature,

but rather with the source of evil and with the evil itself.

Adversus Haereses (IV. 40.3) clearly expresses Irenaeus' position:

...but he took compassion upon man, who through want of care no doubt, but still wickedly [on the part of another], became involved in disobedience; and he turned the enmity by which [the devil] has designed to make [man] the enemy of God, against the author of it, by removing his own anger from man, turning it in another¹⁴ direction, sending it instead upon the serpent.

This same benevolent God, who does not need man at all, seals his goodness in the sending of his Son as challenger of evil.¹⁵

One of Aulén's foremost criticisms of the Latin view of atonement is based in part on its picture of God. Aulén contends that in both the Latin theory and in its consequences, there exists this difficulty in maintaining continuity between the image of God and the divine work.¹⁶ With Irenaeus' emphatic stance against distorting the figure of God, Aulén finds support for his own outlook.

Delineating further his God-picture, Irenaeus insists upon certain essential characteristics of this one God. He is sovereign and a God of power;¹⁷ this mighty God is a just God as well.¹⁸ Irenaeus discusses God's justice in the context of the sending of his Son as the liberator of man, the restorer of man's liberty lost through sin. It is for Irenaeus, however, not simply a question of God's justice and power so that the enemy might be destroyed and God's handiwork preserved - God could not be defeated;¹⁹ but it is also a question of God's tender love and goodness. In a

rather unique explanation Irenaeus details the supremacy of this divine love:

For he is good, and merciful, and patient, and saves whom he ought: nor does goodness desert him in the exercise of justice, nor is his wisdom lessened; for he saves those whom he should save, and judges those worthy of judgment. Neither does he show himself unmercifully just; for his goodness no₂₀ doubt, goes on before and takes precedence.²⁰

Hence, Irenaeus centers man's salvation in redeeming divine love; furthermore, he observes that this gracious God differs from sinful humanity in his benevolence and goodness.²¹

When he depicts God's goodness and justice, the writer of Adversus Haereses does not limit this concept to God's dealings with mankind. The very same justice is manifested toward the Evil One responsible for man's fall. Accomplishing the salvation of fallen man through his Son the Word, God acts justly even toward the unjust Evil One.²² God's anger directs itself toward this Evil One for whom fire as a punishment is prepared;²³ yet even in this he shows himself compassionate to men. Irenaeus portrays God as not absolutely angry with mankind for the fall but as angry with the Evil One.²⁴

Several important features in Irenaeus' thinking emerge as considerations for Aulén's soteriological exposition: the sovereignty of God who cannot be defeated and whose creative purpose cannot be thwarted; the idea of God's displeasure with evil; the concern which God has for his creature who now stands in dire need of redemption.

Aulén understands that the three major characters of his Christus Victor publication - Irenaeus, Anselm and Luther - hold respective responses to the problematics posed by these theological questions. He recognizes likewise that the various images of God concomitant with the soteriological positions of the three either help or hinder an adequate comprehension of the problems involved. As Aulén comes to characterize the various types of atonement presentations - the classic, Latin, and subjective types, he insists, "the ultimate difference between them lies in their images of God."²⁵ While for Aulén the God-image integrally allied with the soteriology of Irenaeus, and later of Luther, appears acceptable, the figure seen in the salvation explanation of Anselm, and in the atonement theories built upon Anselm's proposal, poses great difficulty for him.

C. Man's Fall and Bondage

Irenaeus depicts the fall of humanity in terms of man's belief in the false promises made by the Evil One. He assures man life; man disobeys the God of his creation to follow these empty promises and thereby brings death upon himself.

For at the first Adam became a vessel in his (Satan's) possession, whom he did also hold under his power, that is, by bringing sin on him iniquitously, and under the colour of immortality entailing death upon him.²⁶

The devil cannot deliver his pledge; hence, man's fall from the God of life to the realm of death. Yet Irenaeus does not relate this totally to the devil. Man possesses freedom and in using this quality, he has consented to the false promises.²⁷ The reward of man's disobedience is the power-hold of death; the devil has brought death as a force over man because of man's disobedience which is sin. God's creature desperately needs redemption.

Irenaeus considers death as a consequence of man's sin, the necessary accompanying element of man's disobedience. However, in Irenaeus' thought, punishment is reserved more strictly for the source of the reign of death. Again the author of Adversus Haereses shows a God of anger toward evil and of partiality toward his stricken creation.

...but he pronounced the curse upon him in the first instance, that it might fall upon men with a mitigated rebuke. For God detested him who had led man astray, but by degrees, and little by little, he²⁸ showed compassion to him who had been beguiled.

A mitigated rebuke towards fallen men and detestation of the devil characterize God's attitude. In Irenaeus' treatment of the fall, death serves yet another purpose, that of setting a limit to sin.

But he set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and thus causing sin to cease (Rom. 6:7), putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to²⁹ sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God.

Reviewing Irenaeus' statements, one notices again Irenaeus' insistence that God's anger is directed not to man

but to the trouble. Aulén obviously finds the Latin type of atonement severely deficient in this area since it lends itself so easily to a conception that the contenders in the redemptive drama are God and man. Aulén insists that in the classic view God confronts evil and not his creature. While Anselm's intentions may have been far from this kind of distortion, the common notions of the satisfaction scheme of salvation do tend to such a caricature.³⁰ Likewise, Aulén's "dual aspect" method of viewing death is quite apparent - death as a tyrant over man and death as an instrument of God's purpose.³¹

If man becomes a creature in bondage because of the fall, how does this relate to God's creative purpose in regard to man? Irenaeus describes man as created in the "image and likeness" of God.³² Second century Gnostic anthropology utilizes the same terminology.³³ Gnostic thought portrays man as a many-level creature - material man, animal man, and spiritual man.³⁴ In usual docetic and dualistic fashion, material and animal man count for little; spiritual man receives the greatest attention. Describing Adam, Irenaeus refuses to accept the Gnostic conclusion. He relates this image and likeness idea to the "hands" of God by which creation takes place, i.e. the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit.³⁵ Image and likeness go far beyond being static concepts; man receives creation not just as image and likeness, but as image and likeness directed to growth.³⁶ Sin damages this image and likeness;

nevertheless, they are not destroyed completely because this aspect of man does not exist all at once and for all. Man's destiny involves growth in God.³⁷ Humanity's sin poses an obstacle to this maturity; hence, redemption must deal with removing this and all other obstacles. Some confusion arises over Irenaeus' use of image and likeness terminology due to the fact that he sometimes separates the terms. However in reviewing Irenaeus, one notes that he does this sparingly.³⁸ Another possible source of misunderstanding image and likeness arises from the opinion of the terms as a "given" in man rather than seeing the meaning as involving both "given" and "goal." A static idea of creation abets this misunderstanding.³⁹

Following the same line, Irenaeus' view of the fall of man does not presuppose any ideal perfect state lost by sin.⁴⁰ Man is created as relatively perfect; perfect in the sense that he has come from God's Word and Wisdom - relative in that man is destined to increase and grow.⁴¹ Man has freedom and intelligence but he is still a child needing maturity.⁴² Sin impedes this process; by redemption that block is taken away and the movement can continue; God's creature can truly become man.

Continuing Irenaeus' thought, one acknowledges that his concept of salvation centers on the way creation can be brought to its final goal and how the obstacles which place humanity in a state of bondage can be removed. Of course, Aulén criticizes those atonement explanations which focus on

satisfaction or types of substitution in achieving redemption. For Aulén and for the classic proposition, the motif of struggle and conflict, by which at the same time (gleichzeitig - på samma gång) mankind's enemies are overcome and all obstacles to creation's proper and intended fulfillment are removed, expresses the true reality.

D. Christ's Salvific Work

Discussing the exaggerations of the Gnostics, Irenaeus poses the key question of Adversus Haereses: "Ut quid enim descendebat?" - For what purpose did Christ descend among us?⁴³ Irenaeus' response stands at the very heart of his refutation of Gnosticism with the additional result of providing an affirmative, structured soteriology for the second century Church.⁴⁴

As he presents the figure of Jesus, Irenaeus differs sharply from the Gnostics. Gnostic dualism envisions the Christ in docetist terms; the eternal Word is in the flesh of Jesus but the Word cannot suffer. The Jesus figure of Gnosticism emerges as a dispensational Jesus. God's Spirit is upon him but Jesus does not suffer in the flesh; the Spirit departs from him before the suffering.⁴⁵ Irenaeus cites various examples of such thinking.⁴⁶ Reacting strongly to such docetist-dualist ideas which deny any redemptive value in the flesh and which despise intellectually and practically material existence, Irenaeus

fills Adversus Haereses with a constant theme: Jesus is real flesh and the true Word; as Savior, he genuinely experiences temptation, suffering, and death; the total Jesus is raised from the dead; he reigns as Lord of the Church and the fulfillment of mankind.

While Gustaf Aulén's theological work does not need to refute the distortions of the Gnostics, nevertheless, Irenaeus' emphasis on the true humanity of Jesus figures prominently in Aulén's Christus Victor presentation. All the same, a repeated criticism is that Aulén does not give adequate place to Jesus' humanity in the salvation process. In objecting to the Latin type of atonement, Aulén has been accused of being docetist in his thinking. Aulén remains fully conscious of the objection: "With reference to the discussion of Christus Victor, I should like to make a brief comment on two recurring objections. One claims that the human side of Christ does not receive due recognition in my book, which therefore has 'docetist' tendencies. I can well understand that some of my statements could be regarded like that."⁴⁷ Presenting his exposition, Aulén is concerned not to speak of salvation in terms of what Christ does qua God and qua man; rather he insists that this must be viewed in a "double aspect" in terms of what God does in Christ seen from a human aspect and a divine aspect, yet one unified work. Aulén strives to clarify his position in The Drama and the Symbols:

The main point of this is that we have here a unitary and indivisible life's work, and that this

has to be seen from a double aspect: as a human work and as a divine work. It is not a work that can be divided up into being partly human and partly divine. From one side, the whole life's work is a human work, through and through, but, from the other⁴⁸ side, it is a divine work, through and through.

One response to the objection posed by Aulén's critics focuses attention on Irenaeus. In Adversus Haereses Irenaeus forcefully opposes the Gnostics and their docetism. Aulén cannot be accused of being docetist as long as he remains faithfully a follower of Irenaeus; nor can he be unaware of the implications of slipping into a type of docetist position. At first, it does seem that Aulén seeks to side-step the question at hand.⁴⁹ But it may then be asked: does the very terminology have validity? To speak in terms of what Christ does qua God and qua man is already to pose the question in a way that whatever response is given tends to be misleading. The terms themselves are posited equally in a proposition where the realities which the terms represent - God and man - cannot be framed in this type of equality. To ask what God does through man appears better; to inquire what God does in Christ is really the question. In his "side-step" of the question and in his employment of "dual aspect" terminology, Aulén actually approaches the problem from the uniqueness of the terms involved.

As he moves on in his theological endeavor, Aulén shows himself increasingly alert to his apparent deficiency in regard to the human side of Christ. He progressively

recognizes the necessity for a more integrated soteriological presentation in respect to the historical Jesus and his message. The Drama and the Symbols, Jesus in Contemporary Historical Research, and Kristen gudstro i förändringens värld convey such an unfolding appreciation for the Savior's humanity. Commenting on the importance of a reliable knowledge concerning the Jesus in history, Aulén contends that the message of the Christian Church depends on its understanding of Jesus:

During this century we have experienced a period of radical skepticism when scholars did not dare write books on Jesus, and this refusal both opened the way for a variety of inferior writings about Jesus and also tried to make us believe that it was quite irrelevant - at any rate for Christian faith - whether we knew or did not know anything historically trustworthy about Jesus, his proclamation, and his mighty acts. Such reasoning is totally unrealistic, a chimera, a kind of hide-and-go-seek.⁵⁰

While Aulén's comments and intention in his later publications appear distant from his employment of Irenaeus in chapter two of Christus Victor, nonetheless, the regard for a viable comprehension of the genuine human side of Jesus possesses essential relevance for Aulén's developed soteriology. By the time he issued Jesus in Contemporary Historical Research (1974), Aulén had not only come to demonstrating more explicitly a greater sensitivity for the role of Jesus' humanity in the soteriological drama, but he apparently had progressed beyond the seeming coldness and avowedly non-kerygmatic Lundensian posture manifested in his earlier works. His citation of Birger Gerhardsson's

affirmation ("Jesus is already the gospel - that is, already during the days of his earthly ministry.") fuses together both the Gospel proclamation which holds central place for the very existence of Christianity and the historical person of the "earthly" Jesus.⁵¹ At no point does Gustaf Aulén declare that now he explicitly proposes a greater appreciation for the human side of Jesus than previously expressed; nevertheless, the increasing emphasis in this direction can hardly remain unnoticed.

Regarding Aulén's use of Irenaeus, Gustaf Wingren speaks of "the failure to accord to the humanity of Jesus the central place in soteriology which it undoubtedly has in the New Testament."⁵² Stating that the cause of this neglect was the strongly anti-liberal attitude of European theology after World War I, Wingren indicates that "this is true even in Aulén's presentation of the classical theory of the atonement which he [Aulén] broadly bases on Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation."⁵³ The explanation Wingren offers affects Aulén's Christus Victor soteriological exposition. Wingren pointedly declares: "We must therefore state that Aulén does not make clear what the humanity of Christ means, and to a large extent this is because he does not take creation as his starting-point, but begins with the New Testament and the second article. He has lost sight of the prehistory of the Old Testament and with its disappearance the significance of Christ's humanity has been weakened, i.e. his involvement in Adam's situation, the

situation of men."⁵⁴ Although it is correct that Aulén's later theological contributions do indeed reflect an intensified value for the humanity of Christ, Wingren's criticism of the early 1960's serves the purpose of exposing a major difficulty in Aulén's soteriology. While Norman Hjelm's study of Aulén (1960) similarly observes the very same fact,⁵⁵ Wingren's allegation brings Aulén into problematic conflict with Irenaeus whose consideration of humanity's salvation centers itself directly in what God does for his creation. Irenaeus' key term, recapitulatio, embodies the substance of this second century theological presentation.

Wingren's discussion in Gospel and Church sheds light on both the value and the deficiency of Aulén's Christus Victor approach. Wingren recognizes that those critics of Aulén who "tried to defend Christ's human nature by attacking his [Aulén's] theory," found themselves forced "into the position of defending the Orthodox doctrines of satisfaction," the Latin type of redemption.⁵⁶ This however, for Wingren, places them on extremely dangerous ground since they inevitably find themselves faced with a notion of an appeasement of God "if such an interpretation fails to begin with creation."⁵⁷ Gustaf Wingren proposes as a solid soteriological alternative the need to start with "Adam's destruction of creation" and "Christ's obedience and humiliation 'unto death' (as) the opposite of what Adam did and therefore the restoration and deliverance of man."⁵⁸

with such a fundamental basis, Wingren suggests that Aulén's view of atonement can be criticized from within itself rather than by recourse to the Latin type of atonement or later satisfaction ideas with their respective problematics.⁵⁹ Making a positive comment in Aulén's direction, he observes, "the development of the classical concept will require a new and vigorous emphasis on the humanity of Christ as long as we employ the doctrine of salvation as the recapitulation of creation to its fullest extent."⁶⁰ By beginning with the prehistory of the Old Testament and the first article of the Creed, Wingren confidently proposes that "the simple references in the Gospels to the humanity of Jesus will fall into their proper place."⁶¹

In explicating his argument, Wingren significantly assists Aulén's soteriological presentation. His consideration shows that the alternatives to the classic view which focus on the activity/relationship between the Father and Jesus - whether characterized as "satisfaction," "substitution," or "example" - neglect the essential point of the redemptive action, God's creation stands in need of salvation. Irenaeus highlights this theological principle in his recapitulatio and Adam-Christ typology. Wingren indicates that a major deficiency of Aulén's proposal lies in the absence of an integral emphasis on creation. The flaw may well reside in Aulén's exposition rather than in the classic view itself, since Irenaeus' Adversus Haereses

certainly does explain redemption as the recapitulatio of fallen creation. Aulén's writings in the latter part of his theological career manifest his willingness to remedy this situation. Clearly Wingren has pinpointed two conspicuous criticisms of Aulén's exposition: a lack of sufficient emphasis on the humanity of Jesus; and an inadequate place for creation in the redemption presentation. It may be true to say that Aulén's affirmation, "the God of creation and the God of salvation are one and the same," demonstrates Aulén's clarification in later years.⁶²

Following his critique of Aulén, Wingren analyzes the contribution of Aulén's mentor, Einar Billing. Wingren commends Billing's regard for the humanity of Jesus, for the resurrection as the heart of the salvific drama, and for the forgiveness of sins as man's personal Exodus.⁶³ Yet he objects to Billing's inadequate treatment of creation.⁶⁴ Billing's one-sided emphasis on God's primary act as that of forgiveness and on God's purpose as intimately tied to Israel's history narrows his vision of God's creative intent throughout all human life and experience. In failing to appreciate creation itself as the fundamental starting-point for the redemptive drama, Billing limits God to the Church, tones down God's wrath or displeasure with evil, and is unable to understand death as both a power of destruction and an instrument of judgment.⁶⁵ Wingren suggests that Billing's theology must not miss the essential point that it is God's creation that needs to be healed and restored.⁶⁶

Irenaeus' theological work exalts this extremely crucial truth.

Can one ask how salvation is depicted in Irenaeus' presentation of Christ's saving work? Aulén asserts that the dominant theme for Irenaeus is the classic one of struggle and victory.

E. The Motif of Struggle and Victory

In the second chapter of the published Christus Victor, Aulén repeats Irenaeus' methodological query: "Ut quid enim descendebat?" - "Why did he therefore descend to men?"⁶⁷ And Aulén immediately proceeds to review Irenaeus' expressions which seem to favor a "naturalistic" or "physical" doctrine of salvation. He states: "The gift of immortality is regarded as dependent on the Incarnation as such; by entrance of the divine into humanity, human nature is (as it were) automatically endued with divine virtue and thereby saved from corruption."⁶⁸ He then underlines the theological difficulty: "This is, then, a theology primarily of the Incarnation, not of the atonement; the 'work' of Christ holds a secondary place."⁶⁹ Aulén adds that this perception of course fits well with the liberal theology of the early twentieth century.⁷⁰ He disputes this interpretation and invites a closer scrutiny of Irenaeus' endeavors.

Hastings Rashdall's historic work, The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology, which includes a detailed analysis of Patristic thinking, treats of Irenaeus' soteriological stance as focused in the Incarnation; but as Rashdall (whose own soteriological conclusions Aulén discounts as "subjectivist") explains this point, he himself develops his examination of Irenaeus in the direction of Aulén's motif of struggle.⁷¹ Rashdall observes that the "deification" tendency of Patristic thought, even though it is to be found in certain passages of Adversus Haereses such as in III.19.1 ("quomodo enim homo transiet in Deum, si non Deus in hominem?"), offers a type of mythological explanation inadequate to the soteriological reality at hand.⁷² Rashdall himself would prefer to clarify Irenaeus in the direction of salvific restoration as achieved by the "moral influence of Christ's character and teaching and example, and the revelation of the Father which they contain."⁷³ Even though Rashdall supports a "subjectivist" view of the "moral influence" of Christ's redemptive role, his discussion of Irenaeus lends ample credibility to Aulén's insistence on the struggle motif.

In attempting to come to terms with what Irenaeus actually affirms regarding man's salvation, what can be said beforehand concerning a "naturalistic" or "physical" manner of redemption? This position claims that suffering and death are not needed; the mere fact that divinity has entered humanity has divinized man and thereby saved him.

such a "naturalistic" or "physical" outlook toward the Incarnation itself as salvation concentrates on what leads up to the Lord's coming in the flesh; the attention then diminishes in considering the actual events which come later and turns instead to the effects which the Incarnation has on a deification of humanity. In doing this however, the notion does not respond to the question of how exactly man is saved. If the response is that redemption is accomplished by the entry of divinity into humanity, one need ask further to what extent does this entry penetrate humanity. The answer, Irenaeus realizes, is not found primarily in Irenaeus' teaching but in the Apostolic preaching which must be upheld in the face of attack.⁷⁴ Salvation must touch man precisely in those areas where humanity needs saving if it is not to be false.⁷⁵ However, the Gnostic interpretation of Jesus as impassible fits easily into such a naturalist position on saving work. Irenaeus' docetist adversaries argue from a preconceived notion that the true God cannot suffer. A "naturalistic" or "physical" approach to salvation does not necessitate the same presupposition, but it does leave the temptations, passion, and death of Jesus as somewhat "supra-added," and the resurrection as a consoling but rather unnecessary appendage to the whole process.⁷⁶ Irenaeus moves in the other direction; the coming of divinity into humanity is real; furthermore, the Incarnation and mankind's salvation

do not cease at this point. Irenaeus rules out any such static dimension:

For as he became man in order to undergo temptation, so also was he the Word that he might be glorified; the Word remaining quiescent, that he might be capable of being tempted, dishonoured, crucified, and of suffering death...the human nature being swallowed up in it (the divine), when it conquered, and endured [without yielding], and performed acts of kindness, and⁷⁷ rose again, and was received up [into heaven].

...nor did he truly redeem us by⁷⁸ his own blood, if he did not really become man....

The question of Irenaeus' relationship to the idea of a "natural" or "physical" redemption has received wide attention from many commentators since this "naturalist" thinking was common to the Patristic era. Joseph F. Mitros attempts to summarize in general the Patristic salvation categories as follows:

- 1) the pedagogical or "Christ as Teacher" theory;
- 2) the mythological/transaction/ransom theory;
- 3) the recapitulation/restoration theory;
- 4) the physical/Incarnational theory;
- 5) the realistic/sacrificial theory;
- 6) the satisfaction theory.⁷⁹

Mitros understands that such a soteriological schema oversimplifies the situation and still serves a positive purpose for theological analysis. He comments significantly, however, on Irenaeus' particular approach: "...according to some students of Patrology the theory of recapitulation seems to have constituted the background of

all Patristic views of redemption. The work of Christ seems always to have been considered as the restoration of mankind to the original state of blessedness in every possible way by Christ."⁸⁰ Mitros clearly distinguishes Irenaeus' proposal from that of a "physical" or "natural" type of redemption and likewise contends that Irenaeus' basic idea of "Christ undoing what Adam had done to men" underlies all redemption concepts.⁸¹

Examining the idea of a "physical" redemption theory in Irenaeus, John I. Hochban disputes such a position.⁸² This commentator emphasizes the notions of "solidarity" in Irenaeus: "the solidarity of the human race with its head, Adam, and its resultant fall, and the solidarity of that same human race with its new head, Christ, and its subsequent restoration."⁸³ While not directly referring to Irenaeus, Aulén's use of the "solidarity" concept features prominently in The Drama and the Symbols.⁸⁴ It forms a key soteriological feature of Aulén's developing victory soteriology.

Hochban's evaluation of how Irenaeus depicts the redemption proposes that Irenaeus' idea goes beyond the Incarnation to the entire life of Christ. Redemption is not completed by the Incarnation in itself: "It is true that the Incarnation has redemptive implications in the divine plan, but the work of salvation is not completed in the Incarnation; it is merely made possible. The full realization takes place through the whole life of Christ."⁸⁵

Aulén's treatment of Irenaeus' soteriology demonstrates the same understanding. A further statement by Hochban intensifies Aulén's emphasis on the conflict-victory motif in Adversus Haereses: "There are passages in the Adversus Haereses where the expressions "incarnatus est" and "passus est" are practically synonymous. (I.9.3; III.18.3) In explaining the motives of the Savior's suffering and death, St. Irenaeus has recourse to the same formulae he had used in expounding the reasons for the Incarnation."⁸⁶ Hochban's evaluation not only rejects a "physical" idea of redemption in Irenaeus; he also demonstrates the intimate unity between Jesus' struggle and the assumption of human nature.⁸⁷ While Hochban does not go as far as Aulén in subsuming all of Irenaeus' atonement thinking under the struggle-victory concept, he predicates a parity of the Incarnation and death in Adversus Haereses, even though Irenaeus' exposition is "not clearly ordered and rigidly systematized."⁸⁸ Hochban's analysis substantiates Aulén's fundamental assertion concerning an on-going struggle-victory motif in Irenaeus' theology.

In a similar study, William P. Loewe poses a crucial question: Is Irenaeus proposing an Incarnational soteriology centered on the union of divine and human natures in Christ?⁸⁹ Answering negatively, Loewe enumerates three compelling reasons for his case: 1) given Irenaeus' narrative mode of theological presentation, a "theory" along these lines is hardly relevant; 2) "if Greek soteriology is

often constructed by historians as a 'physical' theory whereby redemption occurs in some quasi-automatic fashion at the level of nature, such an idea is positively excluded in Irenaeus' polemic against the Gnostics....Salvation is a matter of faith and righteousness, not nature and substance"; 3) "Irenaeus does not regard the Incarnation as a discrete point or single event."⁹⁰ Loewe's thoughts bolster Aulén's argument against seeing Irenaeus as just another Patristic writer whose soteriology is "physical."

On the other hand, Loewe criticizes Aulén's sweeping historical typology.⁹¹ The author contends that despite the many investigations, Irenaeus' soteriology is still open to a variety of interpretations.⁹² At the same time, Loewe confirms two positive results from Aulén's Christus Victor and its exploration of Irenaeus: a) the impossibility of simply dismissing the tradition prior to Anselm as "crudely mythological or merely Hellenistic" (notions such as ransom, the devil, etc.); b) Aulén's rediscovery "of the originating, transformative power of symbolic discourse as the primary language of religious consciousness."⁹³

Reflecting on Irenaeus' question, "For what purpose did Christ come down from heaven?", Gustaf Aulén firmly emphasizes the struggle-victory motif: "That he might destroy sin, overcome death, and give life to man." (A.H. III.18.7 - "ut occideret quidem peccatum, evacualet autem mortem, et vivificaret hominem."). Obviously, Aulén proposes that in Irenaeus' argumentation the Christus Victor

classic theme of redemption stands out clearly and decisively. Describing Irenaeus' consideration of sin, death, and the devil as the enemies of mankind, Aulén observes: "The main idea is clear. The work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil."⁹⁴ He realizes that Irenaeus places in God himself the source of the victorious power overcoming such hostility; Adversus Haereses indicates that "not by ourselves, but by the help of God we must be saved" (Is. 25:3).⁹⁵ And in God himself the motivation for Irenaeus rests with the divine love: "But the Lord himself will save them, because he loves them, and will spare them: he will himself set them free." (Is. 63:9).⁹⁶

Along these lines, Aulén examines what he considers a grave defect in the Latin type of atonement and a distortion of Irenaeus' view in this regard: the opposition between atonement and the Incarnation.⁹⁷ Affirming that in the classic idea, "the Incarnation and atonement always stand in closest relation to one another," Aulén suggests that Irenaeus' treatment of the subject has been seriously misrepresented.⁹⁸ For Aulén following Irenaeus, the Incarnation and atonement, through the taking on of real flesh, occurs as a process not just as a moment or point. The salvation drama entails not simply the taking of flesh, but incarnation with all its consequences. Aulén insists on the functional unity of the Incarnation and the atoning work

of Jesus. In presenting Irenaeus' explanation of the necessity of the Incarnation, Aulén links this with the theme of struggle and victory:

What, then, is the place of the Incarnation in relation to the work of Christ and to his victory? It is indeed true, and it is of fundamental importance, that the Incarnation is the corner-stone of Irenaeus' theology. But it is no more true to say that all depends on the Incarnation apart from the redemptive work than it would be to make all depend on the work apart from the Incarnation. To make an opposition between the two is altogether to miss the point. In Irenaeus' thought, the Incarnation is the necessary preliminary to the atoning work, because only God is able to overcome the powers which hold man in bondage, and man is helpless. The work of man's deliverance is accomplished by God himself, in Christ.

Aulén remains convinced that the Latin type of atonement separates the assumption of flesh and the work of Christ;¹⁰⁰ the classic idea strives to maintain the closest possible unity between the two.¹⁰¹ Irenaeus and Aulén provide an explanation as to how salvation is achieved (in struggle and victory) rather than just stating the fact of its accomplishment. The "physical" redemption theory and the Latin type of atonement convey an interpretation, but Irenaeus and Aulén can object that these presentations do not fit with the concrete, de facto expressions found in the biblical foundations.¹⁰²

Gustaf Wingren explores this same area commenting: "Aulén has long maintained that the Christology of the early Fathers had the merit of holding together the Incarnation and the crucifixion - Christ 'became' man in all that he did. The more he assumed of Adam's burden the more the

purpose of the Incarnation was fulfilled. The death on the cross was the culmination of his becoming man."¹⁰³ Here once more Wingren indicates that the theological problems concerned with the integral relationship of the Incarnation to atonement are linked to an "inadequate treatment of the doctrine of creation."¹⁰⁴

Christus Victor portrays Irenaeus as a notable source for Aulén's presentation of the classic atonement idea. Analyzing Irenaeus' thought, one recognizes three interrelated areas where the struggle theme blends this integral connection between a theology of the Incarnation and that of atonement: Christ's temptations; the obedience of the Savior; and the typology of Adam-Christ.

Assessing Irenaeus' views, Hastings Rashdall discloses his own feelings regarding the saving work of Christ: "In general, it is the perfect obedience of Christ shown alike in his life and in his death, his resistance to temptation and his triumph over death at the resurrection which has the redeeming effect rather than the death itself considered as penalty or as suffering."¹⁰⁵ Rashdall highlights Christ's obedience in Irenaeus' theology. The advantage of Rashdall's interpretation lies in the fact that he refuses to confine Jesus' salvific work to the death itself, but rather comprehends it as taking place throughout Christ's entire life and ministry. On the other hand, Aulén's Christus Victor idea, while not divorcing ministry and death, stresses Calvary with all its paradox as the nucleus

of the atonement, something Rashdall in his "subjectivist" position does not favor.

Aulén observes that Irenaeus' discussion cannot be evaluated correctly without appreciating the point that the motif of struggle and conflict holds the key to Irenaeus' salvation exposition. Emphasizing the true flesh of Christ, Irenaeus follows this through by illustrating what the Incarnation entails: obedience, conflict and victory. Aulén bluntly states: "The divine victory accomplished in Christ stands in the center of Irenaeus' thought, and forms the central element in the recapitulatio, the restoring and the perfecting of the creation, which is his most comprehensive theological idea."¹⁰⁶

In this same line of reasoning, Gustaf Wingren supports Aulén's contention regarding the conflict theme as integral to Irenaeus' theology of salvation. Wingren insists that Irenaeus holds creation and the Incarnation together; and within that decisive unity, man's redemption is achieved:

The concept of becoming man in Irenaeus develops immediately and naturally into the concept of conflict and victory....The two ideas are inseparably related, and if they are isolated from one another, they are both inadequate and incomplete.¹⁰⁷

Wingren's description serves to strengthen Aulén's stand regarding Irenaeus.

Presenting his concept of man's salvation, Irenaeus' discussion reaches a highpoint in Book III, chapters 18 to 23 of Adversus Haereses. In III.18.6, Irenaeus summarizes

concisely how redemption through Christ has been accomplished:

For he fought and conquered; for he was man contending for the fathers, and through obedience doing away with disobedience completely: for he bound the strong man, (Matthew 12:29) and set free the weak, and endowed his own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin. For he is a most holy and merciful Lord, and loves the human race.¹⁰⁸

One readily observes that the principal elements of Irenaeus' explanation and Aulén's subsequent interpretation are included in this foregoing statement: the motif of struggle; obedience contrasted with disobedience; achieving redemption through the destruction of sin; and divine love as the motivation for creation. Similarly, Irenaeus intensifies his claim that mankind's salvation results from Christ's victory in overcoming temptation and the cross:

For as he became man in order to undergo temptation, so also was he the Word that he might be glorified; the Word remaining quiescent, that he might be capable of being tempted, dishonoured, crucified, and of suffering death...the human nature being swallowed up in it (the divine), when it conquered, and endured [without yielding], and performed acts of kindness, and rose again, and was received up [into heaven].¹⁰⁹

Gustaf Wingren reminds the readers of Adversus Haereses that for Irenaeus the true manhood of Christ occupies the center of this redemptive action which costs him a great deal:

But God is in a man, who is tempted in the wilderness and trembles in Gethsemane. The agony which he has to endure was not easier than ours because of his Godhood, but more terrible than any other man has suffered.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, he pointedly remarks: "If we are going to understand Irenaeus we must see this clearly, otherwise we may conceive of Christ's victory as being purely a logical consequence of his divine nature, when in actual fact it was achieved only in the hardest conflict."¹¹¹ Wingren's words, "victory in the hardest conflict," furnish the key to comprehending Aulén's use of Irenaeus; for the classic view, the forces of bondage - sin, death and the devil - are confronted and vanquished.

In the matter of mankind's sinfulness, Aulén declares that Irenaeus opposes a moralistic view of sin as separate and individual acts and instead considers sin organically. Aulén explains that Irenaeus sees sin as "affecting the whole man" both as an "objective power" of bondage and as something "voluntary and wilful."¹¹² He goes on to link sin with death and the power of the devil. Aulén's point here is that for both him and Irenaeus, man stands alienated from God and in need of a reconciliatio. This comes to pass in victory over sin and its cognates, death and the devil.

Wingren offers a more detailed explanation of this victory over sin in his discussion of the necessity of holding together the Incarnation and atonement.¹¹³ He employs the same typology used by Irenaeus, the disparity between Adam and Christ in temptation and struggle. Wingren refers to Adam's attitude toward creation and toward God as "acquisitive," "demanding," and "selfish."¹¹⁴ Christ's disposition expressed in Philippians II:6-9 and in the

Letter to the Hebrews contrasts absolutely with man's. The Lord's victory for Wingren (as well as for Irenaeus and Aulén) is a "triumph of self-giving."¹¹⁵ Wingren cites the three temptations of Christ (in the wilderness, Mt. 4:3,6; at Caesarea Philippi, Mk. 8:32f.; and on the cross) and Christ's refusal "to hold on to what he had, to safeguard his life and to escape death."¹¹⁶ The obedient and self-giving Christ presents a totally different picture from the disobedient and grasping Adam whose sinfulness marks all mankind. Wingren cautions that Christ's conquest must be seen in the integral connection of crucifixion and resurrection, and not only in the latter. Using the Johannine Gospel texts of Jesus being "lifted up" (John 3:14; 7:18) and being "glorified" (John 12:27-33), Wingren declares:

His victory is victory over the power which brought Adam to his downfall. Adam fell by grasping for something. The victor wins the victory by setting himself against the same threat and thereby vanquishing the Tempter in his suffering and death. His very destruction abounds in victory.¹¹⁷

Certain significant points for understanding Irenaeus and Aulén's classic view of atonement emerge from Wingren's analysis: salvation as victory over an opposing power; victory by undergoing the same threat (Irenaeus' concept of recapitulatio); the paradox of defeat and victory "at the same time" (a chief point of Aulén). True to his own particular disposition, Wingren details the kerygmatic aspect of Christ's triumph in the preaching of the

forgiveness of sins which characterizes the central mission of the Church. Wingren interestingly comments:

It is therefore impossible for the Victor to abide by himself alone. The Church must come into being. Gathered together by the Gospel, the Church witnesses to the fact that Adam's acquisitive attitude, demanding and selfish, has been broken.¹¹⁸

Wingren's discussion in this context concretizes Irenaeus' thinking on the redemption and Aulén's idea of Christ as Victor.

With the problematic of overcoming sin, man is confronted likewise by the factor of death. In his thinking, Gustaf Aulén follows Irenaeus who envisions death in a two-fold manner. Death results from man's belief in the false promise of life offered by Satan; the devil is unable to deliver on this promise.¹¹⁹ By breaking faith with God, man cuts himself off from the source of life; death prevails as a result. Yet, death has another function; God uses it as a means of putting a stop to sin. Physical death constitutes an end to man's transgression.¹²⁰

As he interprets Irenaeus, Aulén again employs his "dual aspect" methodology. From the one side death appears as the result of evil; from the other side, it aids God's intention. It serves God's purpose as a manifestation of God's absolute displeasure toward evil; evil cannot endure in the face of God. Further, death places within man an absolute certainty from which he cannot escape except by turning to the only one who can offer man life instead of death. Immortality is achieved by faith. This faith is

connected inseparably with death. As enemy to man and as a sign of God's radical opposition to evil, as well as in its function of teaching man the limits of life apart from God, death to be overcome must be undergone. The Christus as savior must submit to death: as a sign of God's loathing of evil and as showing that only by faith involvement with God can man be saved from mortality.¹²¹ The cross and the resurrection, climactic points of the entire saving life of the Victor, form the basis of that faith which rescues man from death. In Christ's death this purposive intention of God as putting an end to sin is realized in a definitive way. Likewise, by the New Adam's death God manifests his detestation of sin; death is a curse (Gal. 3:14), but in a very specific sense.¹²²

Assessing the viewpoint of Irenaeus and Aulén, can death be said to be mankind's punishment for sin? Irenaeus considers it as the fruit of man's disobedience, and in that sense, a penalty for which man is responsible. Aulén, however, speaks in a guarded way of a God who punishes man for sin. This notion of divine punishment does not sit well with Aulén's thought for two principal reasons: it is not compatible with Irenaeus' emphasis on God's goodness and compassion for man;¹²³ also, the image of a punishing God carries with it all kinds of difficulties. Irenaeus carefully distinguishes God as detesting evil and its source from God as angry with humanity. If there exists a punishment in the true sense of the term, then that

punishment falls upon evil itself rather than upon man.¹²⁴ As Irenaeus sees it, man is oppressed and enslaved rather than punished in the rigid sense of the word. Aulén's reluctance to use the strict punishment notion also arises from his opposition to the Latin type of atonement in which punishment as the background for a satisfaction theology finds ample room.

Identifying the powers of bondage, Irenaeus necessarily considers the devil; the principal points of his presentation are found in Book V of Adversus Haereses. Irenaeus characterizes the devil as an apostate and an enemy;¹²⁵ he falsely promised man what he could not give;¹²⁶ God detests him for such treachery.¹²⁷ This evil being has acted by violent means; however, God's activity is the very opposite in upholding true justice and in not allowing creation to be destroyed: "...neither justice should be infringed upon, nor the ancient handiwork of God go to destruction."¹²⁸ Irenaeus insists that the Savior imparts salvation to man in a gentle fashion (secundum suadelam); and even toward the devil he does not act unjustly.¹²⁹ As in another context, Irenaeus contrasts the actions of Adam and Christ, so here he pictures a similar difference in regard to God and the devil. In Adversus Haereses, V.2.1, he stresses the graciousness and justice of God in light of a redemption achieved not through some type of moral clarification but in the "blood" of Christ:

...not snatching away by stratagem the property of another, but taking possession of his own in a

righteous and gracious manner. As far as concerned the apostasy, indeed, he redeems us righteously from it by his own blood; but as regards us who have been redeemed, [he does this] graciously. For we have given nothing to him previously, nor does he desire anything from us, as if he stood in need of it; but we do stand in need of fellowship with him. And for this reason it was that he graciously poured himself out, that he might gather us into the bosom of the Father.¹³⁰

The devil is puffed-up with pride and a liar.¹³¹ He has unjustly and without right held men in bondage; he is destined to be overcome:

...the Word bound him securely as a fugitive from himself, and made spoil of his goods - namely, those men whom he held in bondage, and whom he unjustly used for his own purposes. And justly indeed is he led captive, who had led men unjustly into bondage....¹³²

Irenaeus' treatment projects two noteworthy points: the devil has no just rights over man; God acts justly and graciously even in his dealings with the Evil One.¹³³ In Christus Victor Aulén describes this "element of justice in Christ's victory over the devil" which exhibits "the righteousness of God's redemptive work."¹³⁴

Hastings Rashdall comments on this by adding, "It was, according to Irenaeus, more suitable to the dignity and justice of God that he should effect his object by persuasion rather than by force."¹³⁵ Rashdall also interjects that Irenaeus' doctrine was "probably suggested to him by the theory of redemption first put forward by Marcion," in that "by bringing about the death of Jesus, the God of the Jews - the generally just but not benevolent Demiurge - had violated his own laws, so that it became just

for the true and benevolent God to set man free from the Demiurge. Irenaeus simply substituted the devil for the Demiurge."¹³⁶

Endorsing Irenaeus' thinking, Aulén refers to Christ's offering himself as ransom for man's salvation:

He who is the almighty Word, and true man, in redeeming us reasonably (rationabiliter) by his blood, gave himself as the ransom, for those who had been carried into captivity.¹³⁷

This ransom terminology receives no extended consideration in Irenaeus; and Aulén notes that although the struggle and victory over the devil forms a frequent theme in Irenaeus, the realistic developed devil imagery of the later Fathers is not present here.¹³⁸ Likewise, Aulén states, "There is only a trace in him of the deception of the devil, which became to some of the other Fathers a subject of engrossing interest."¹³⁹ Rashdall amplifies this in his study of Irenaeus by summarizing two relevant points which manifest a further enhancement of Irenaeus by later Patristic thought, and which may account for the devaluation of the classic view of atonement in favor of a more rationalistic atonement approach:

- a. the dominion of the devil over man which Irenaeus treats as unjust becomes treated as a just dominion: by sin Satan had become man's lawful Lord; deliverance without the payment of a ransom would have been not merely unbecoming to God, but a positive injustice and hence to a just God impossible;
- b. the devil was induced to accept this ransom or equivalent by means of a trick whereby the devil overreaches himself.¹⁴⁰

Rashdall observes: "The final touch was added to the grotesque theory of Rufinus and others when they represent Christ's humanity as the bait which the devil was induced to swallow, and so was caught on the hook of his divinity."¹⁴¹

It is important to note that while critics of Aulén's dramatic view tend to identify his position with such distorted imagery, and thereby wish to discount such an atonement presentation, Irenaeus and the other Fathers purposely utilized such terminology to manifest that God was indeed involved in an active process of redemption and not a salvation by fiat or by syllogistically moral adjustment. Rashdall, whose own thinking progresses in a totally different direction, points out a positive feature of this ransom terminology: "It had at least the good effect of neutralizing concepts of sacrifice and punishment, which, if not less childish, were grosser, more immoral, and more derogatory to the character of God."¹⁴² With Gustaf Aulén's concern for the image of God and his appreciation for religious symbolism over rationalizing "adequate concepts" in theology,¹⁴³ one can understand the compatibility of Rashdall's observations with Aulén's feeling on the subject.

Irenaeus' treatment establishes a unity of the powers opposed to creation; sin, death and the devil are joined together. Christ's struggle and victory defeats this conglomerate of evil. In fiercest conflict man's salvation expresses triumph over all these forces:

...that sin, which was set up and spread out against man, and which rendered him subject to

death, should be deprived of its power, along with death, which rules [over men]; and that the lion, that is, anti-Christ, rampant against mankind in the latter days, should be trampled down by him; and that he should bind "the dragon, that old serpent," (Rev. 20:2) and subject him to the power of man, who had been conquered,¹⁴⁴ so that all his might should be trodden down.

When Irenaeus describes the devil, a personified figure emerges. What can be said of this for Aulén's classic atonement exposition? Such a personification of the devil brings no outstanding difficulty to Aulén's presentation. The use of religious symbol as a means of understanding a reality differs from what Aulén calls an "adequate concept."¹⁴⁵ Aulén does not attempt to define the devil; neither does Irenaeus.¹⁴⁶ Irenaeus accepts the devil imagery and employs it for his own purposes. The idea of devil as religious symbolism carries a distinct value. One may pose the question: what of evil as having an objectivity outside of man or beyond a particular individual? While it may be true to affirm that evil comes from men and sin, evil reaches a point where it emerges as a force outside of humanity. Evil becomes a complex of many evils oppressing man from outside himself. To look at Nazism, racism, exploitation of the weak and to deny their objectivity as realities that tyrannize mankind is not reasonable. They are in every sense demonic forces. In such a concept of demonic forces outside of man, religious symbolism can depict the devil. Aulén affirms this; the devil personifies this objective conglomerate of oppressive evil.¹⁴⁷ The Gospel temptation accounts mentioned by

Irenaeus,¹⁴⁸ when analyzed from the temptations per se, exemplify this. To make material existence the end-all, to act for reasons of self-glorification, to worship anything but God, comprise the essence of the objective forces which threaten man and keep him from living a fuller life. Aulén willingly accepts the validity of this religious symbolism.

The devil in religious symbolism is presented as the fallen angel who tempts man. It is interesting to note, however, that Irenaeus does not attribute the fall of man solely to the devil but to man's freedom as well.¹⁴⁹ Because of this, the fall of man is a real possibility without the devil. With the introduction of freedom, there then exists the possibility of evil arising in such force that it can take on a certain objective demonic existence outside of man. Irenaeus' affirmation of man's freedom in the fall has a noteworthy place in this discussion. So it may be stated: given the devil qua personal creature conceived of in terms of a fallen angel and having a personhood akin to man, the fall is possible; given the actual fall of man, the devil conceived of as a demonic objective existent is real.

Aulén concurs with Irenaeus' thought on man's freedom, and he states in a rather limited way the idea that the devil can serve God's purpose. Possibly one way of understanding such an assertion is to look at Irenaeus' use of the story of Cain and Abel; the justice and goodness of Abel is set in relief against the background of the evil of

cain.¹⁵⁰ Irenaeus takes the fall for granted; he does not attempt to define in depth something which may not be explainable in that way;¹⁵¹ the same holds true for his treatment of the devil. In Christus Victor Aulén follows Irenaeus and does not hesitate to employ the religious symbolism of devil imagery.

Detailing this battle with the devil's power integrally aligned with the entire conglomerate of evil, Irenaeus insists that Christ puts the adversary to utter confusion.¹⁵² Christ is capable of achieving this feat since he possesses greater power and strength than the opposition; inferior or equal power cannot emerge victorious over this array of hostile forces.¹⁵³ God himself enters the scene of the conflict in the coming of the Incarnate Word. Jesus by his life, death and resurrection does battle with and conquers the foes; man receives release from the power-hold of the enemy forces:

Our Lord also by his passion destroyed death, and dispersed error, and put an end to corruption, and destroyed ignorance, while he manifested life and revealed truth and bestowed the gift of incorruption....¹⁵⁴

...for he bound the strong man (Mt. 12:29) and set free the weak, and endowed his own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin.¹⁵⁵

The whole alliance of evil falls with Christ's victory. Aulén's Christus Victor soteriology focuses on Irenaeus' distinctive exposition of triumph over these oppressive powers of bondage.

F. Creation Renewed

Reviewing Irenaeus' theology, Gustaf Wingren insists that Irenaeus essentially unites God's creative purpose with the process of mankind's salvation. God has created man by his own power; man has sinned and thus endangered the creative intention; God through the Incarnate Christ redeems humanity and restores creation by means of a unique and difficult struggle in the human life of Jesus. Wingren remains firm in his thinking that Irenaeus binds creation and the Incarnation together.¹⁵⁶

An essential focus point for Gustaf Wingren's entire theological enterprise is the concept of skapelsetron (creation-faith). His use of this Swedish term conveys not only a belief in God's creation as an event or a doctrine, but also implies a view of creation as dynamic, ongoing, pervasive, and universal.¹⁵⁷ Göran Bexell in Teologisk etik i Sverige sedan 1920-talet analyzes Wingren's entire methodology from the perspective of creation-faith and a kerygmatic thrust ("skapelseteologiska ansats; kerygmatiska ansats").¹⁵⁸ For Wingren, therefore, Irenaeus' recapitulatio embodies God's own divine restoration and renewal of all creation; creation, the Incarnation and the redemptive action merge into a single unified whole. It is from this viewpoint that one can understand Wingren's critique of both Aulén and Billing concerning their

insufficient appreciation for creation as a vital point in soteriological exposition.

And to this same critical issue, Wingren adds the absolute necessity of a deepened emphasis on Christ's humanity.¹⁵⁹ He asserts the following relevant points not only for understanding these recurring criticisms of Aulén and Billing but for seeing Irenaeus' theological rationale as well:

- a. "the distinctive mark of the doctrine of redemption as the restoration of creation is that it begins with the prehistory of the Old Testament and the first article";¹⁶⁰
- b. "...Aulén does not make clear what the humanity of Christ means, and to a large extent this is because he does not take creation as his starting-point...the significance of Christ's humanity has been weakened."¹⁶¹

The crucial factors of a viable creation theology and an appreciation for Christ's genuine humanity provide the structure for Gert Nilsson's comparative study of Aulén and the Danish theologian, Otto Möller (1831-1915).¹⁶² While Nilsson appreciates the positive contributions of Aulén's theology, he faults him for lacking a sufficient appreciation for these two theological principles.¹⁶³ As Nilsson presents his case, one notices that his evaluation of Otto Möller's position of a restored humanity ("återställd mänsklighet") in distinction to Aulén's divine victory ("gudomlig seger") appears drawn too exclusively, since Aulén does indeed address these concerns in various stages of his work.

Writing in Gospel and Church, Wingren pinpoints a devastating consequence resulting from this failure of appreciation for creation which bears directly upon Aulén's soteriological presentation: "...if such an interpretation fails to begin with creation, the struggle undergone by Jesus will be regarded essentially as his appeasement of the wrath of God."¹⁶⁴ On the contrary, Wingren declares that if "we take Adam's destruction of creation as our point of departure, Christ's obedience and humiliation 'unto death' become the opposite of what Adam did and are therefore the restoration and deliverance of man."¹⁶⁵ Here Wingren summarizes Irenaeus' concept of man's salvation: the deliverance of humanity by Christ's repeating the situation of Adam but with the opposite result. Irenaeus' notion of recapitulatio, ἀνακεφαλαιώσις provides the pertinent hermeneutic for this. Aulén reflects on the particular value that Irenaeus' recapitulatio embodies for the classic view of atonement: "The divine victory accomplished in Christ stands in the center of Irenaeus' thought, and forms the central element in the recapitulatio, the restoring and the perfecting of the creation, which is his most comprehensive theological idea."¹⁶⁶ To attempt an understanding of Irenaeus' recapitulatio provides an insight into the key features and deficiencies of Aulén's classic atonement idea.

Irenaeus' view of salvation by the Word is set in relief by a consideration of what has happened to man in

Adam. God created man in his own image and likeness for man to grow and to progress into fullness.¹⁶⁷ The obstacles of sin and death block this growth; the battle-lines of the salvation struggle are drawn. Irenaeus speaks of the obedience of Jesus in contrast to the disobedience of Adam. Adversus Haereses makes plentiful use of this Adam-Christ typology.¹⁶⁸ As Adam disobeyed with the result that sin and death began to reign, so now Christ obeys and life predominates. In this typology Irenaeus uses the word recapitulatio. The term's meaning has been subject to various renderings. Irenaeus understands it as a recapitulation and restoration which removes the obstacles impeding man's growth so that man can continue on to that goal of full conformity to the image and likeness of God for which he was created and unto which he was destined. In the de facto accomplishment of this removal of the obstacles by the Incarnate Word, the whole process of mankind's moving toward that final goal is elevated to a higher plane. The coming of the Word in the flesh adds something definitively new. So recapitulatio is understood not just in the sense of restoration, or a summing-up at an end goal point, but as a restoration and a summation which takes place in the Incarnate Word in a very specific manner; in this sense one can speak of Christ's headship even though it is not properly the etymological root of ἀντικεφαλαιωσις.¹⁶⁹

Recapitulatio is employed by Irenaeus as a comprehensive term for his whole theological thinking.

Seeing the term in its fullest sense, one can affirm that it does serve this purpose. It does succeed in touching the beginning point [Adam] in its sense of restoration; it reaches out eschatologically to the summing-up that will be decisive in the end; and it brings with it an appreciation of the importance of the Savior's work as a present victory over the obstacles hindering man's growth. This recapitulatio accomplished by the Lord in his whole life must extend also to Adam, for to leave him out is for God to concede defeat to the powers over man; he who is first led into captivity is also rescued.¹⁷⁰

...but when he became incarnate, and was made man, he commenced afresh ('in seipso recapitulavit') the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam - namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God - that we might recover in Christ Jesus.¹⁷¹

Irenaeus speaks of Adam and the whole human race as one. When he discourses on Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience, he easily transfers the idea to all mankind.¹⁷² Along these same lines Irenaeus discusses the birth of the two - Adam of virgin soil, Jesus of the virgin Mary.¹⁷³ This amplifies the typology and serves to enhance the analogy.

The Adam-Christ typology of Irenaeus opens onto subsidiary themes, in particular: the Eve-Mary typology and the symbolism of the tree. As he contrasts Adam's disobedience with the obedience of the Christ, in the same fashion Irenaeus builds up an Eve-Mary contrast. The

comparison is drawn however not so much from direct interest in the figures themselves but rather from their effect on the salvation scheme. Hence, Mary's faith and fidelity stand opposed to Eve's lack of faithfulness;¹⁷⁴ this typology gives way to the tree symbolism used by Irenaeus. Irenaeus' use of a typology method obviously strengthens his assertion that there is no split between the Old Dispensation and the New; a continuous line runs through all of it from the Lord God who is one and the same. This procedure also serves to counter the Gnostic use of symbols. As man was conquered in a tree setting, so too now he finds his freedom in the tree-wood of the cross.¹⁷⁵ One tree bespeaks disobedience and death; the other heralds victory and life.¹⁷⁶ Recapitulatio is accomplished by the loving God who upon a tree draws all things to himself (John 12:32; 3:14).

Hastings Rashdall's comments on Irenaeus' use of recapitulatio shed light on the notion that this process of "going over" Adam's ground again takes place throughout the entire life of Christ and cannot be focused exclusively on the death. This reinforces Aulén's view regarding the Christus Victor theme. Rashdall declares: "In general, it is the perfect obedience of Christ shown alike in his life and in his death, his resistance to temptation and his triumph over death at the resurrection which has the redeeming effect rather than the death itself considered as penalty or suffering."¹⁷⁷ He interprets Irenaeus'

recapitulatio: "the meaning seems to be that in Christ, the second Adam, that true ideal of humanity, which owing to the fall the first Adam and his posterity had failed to realize, has now at last attained its full realization through him in all redeemed humanity."¹⁷⁸ Rashdall includes the important affirmation that in this salvation process Irenaeus does not propose a "retrospective forgiveness" of sins accomplished by Christ, but rather "the destruction of sinfulness and the consequent or concomitant restoration of that incorruptibility and immortality...that actual deification, for which man was created."¹⁷⁹ Hence, Christ's struggle and victory resulting in salvation looks not primarily to the past but to the present and future.

Discussing Irenaeus' use of recapitulatio, Aulén considers Irenaeus' emphasis on the obedience of Christ throughout the salvation drama.¹⁸⁰ Again, this solidifies Aulén's classic idea whereby the "earthly life of Christ as a whole is thus regarded as a continuous process of victorious conflict."¹⁸¹ In this assertion, however, Aulén does not wish to denigrate the importance of the ultimate struggle which leads to Christ's death on the cross, "the final decisive battle."¹⁸² Here he refers to Irenaeus' usage of ransom, a ransom directed to the powers of evil.¹⁸³ Gustaf Wingren's review of the ransom concept in Irenaeus serves to clear up the misunderstanding which surrounds this point:

A man who joins battle in order to deliver his friend does not give his life as a payment to the

enemy, though he does give it as a "ransom" for the other - victory is won through conflict and death, and by victory the captive is delivered.¹⁸⁴

The purpose of the ransom notion, when cleared of all distorted imagery, is to demonstrate the active involvement of God in the salvation-atonement process: God acts; God gives; and God redeems through the Christ made real flesh. Aulén clearly disputes the general proposition of Rashdall's The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology that the relationship of salvation to Christ's death on the cross is an early Christian formulation adopted uncritically by the Church and which does not convey the actual reality of the redemption.¹⁸⁵ Aulén observes further that it is not Christ's death in isolation but "it is the death seen in connection, on the one hand, with the life-work of Christ as a whole, and on the other with the Resurrection and Ascension; the death irradiated with the light of Easter and Pentecost."¹⁸⁶ For Aulén as for Irenaeus, Easter and Pentecost affect the present and the future; hence, the redemption of mankind centered in Jesus' victorious conflict continues on.

G. The Final Goal

Analyzing Irenaeus' thinking, Aulén understands that a definite eschatological dimension is included here. This eschatological aspect marks the activity of the Spirit within the Church: the fulfillment of man's destiny

(recapitulatio) guaranteed by the victory of Jesus is being accomplished unto a final consummation. Aulén advances the idea that for Irenaeus, "the decisive victory over the powers of evil, which was won on the cross...is also the starting-point for the new dispensation, for the gift of the Spirit, for the continuation of the work of God in the souls of men...."¹⁸⁷ With direct clarity, Aulén declares: "The recapitulation does not end with the triumph of Christ over the enemies which had held man in bondage; it continues in the work of the Spirit in the Church."¹⁸⁸ The decisive battle of the combat against evil has been won by Christ; yet Aulén understands that for Irenaeus "the completeness of the recapitulation is not realized in this life."¹⁸⁹ The process attains completion in the fulfillment of all things in the final days.

Reflecting on Irenaeus' eschatological viewpoint, Wingren likewise agrees that Irenaeus' recapitulatio looks forward to a final completion with the Church functioning in an important capacity:

Recapitulatio is effected now in the Church, for Christ is active now, after his resurrection but before the Last Judgment, in the Church - he lives now as man among those who hear his Word. The Ecclesia is those who have gathered around Christ. Christ's work in itself is finished and complete, but it has not yet extended to every part of human life....This process of extension continues while time moves on to the ultimate dissolution¹⁹⁰ and transformation of every part of creation.

In another setting, Wingren expresses the very same thought in a more succinct fashion: "In actual fact the whole of Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation in all its phases is

oriented towards the Parousia."¹⁹¹ Wingren further recognizes that the Church in proclaiming the Gospel as the forgiveness of sins and in sharing the sacraments extends and actualizes the reality expressed by Irenaeus' concept of the recapitulation of all creation by Christ.¹⁹² Aulén's Christus Victor soteriology amplifies this very same theme.

One might ask of Irenaeus and Aulén why the definitive victory must await the final consummation at the end. Several responses can be offered. First, this position appears in the biblical foundations. Second, sin, death and the devil are still to be found in the world. A third response lies in the relationship between creation and redemption.¹⁹³ If one thinks of creation and redemption as static, one-time events, then the awaiting of a definitive victory at the end makes little sense. In the thought of Irenaeus and Aulén following him, they are not static.¹⁹⁴ God has created and continues to create. Mankind is Adam and constantly finds himself in need of redemption. The "increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) command of God to Adam is intended for the final fulfillment of humanity. Christ's victory signifies the fact that the process of man's growth from creation to final consummation in his Creator God is now no longer impeded. The power-hold of sin, death, and the devil has been overcome. Christus Victor has broken the chains.

Commenting on the importance of such a Christus Victor theme for Irenaeus' discussion of redemption, John Lawson

emphasizes the importance of the struggle-victory motif for Irenaeus' picture of the Christ drawn from the Gospels:

It is 'Christus Victor' that is the certain and undoubted feature of the Gospels. The 'Servant of Jehovah' is by no means excluded from the picture, but the outline of this figure is not very clear.¹⁹⁵

Lawson further observes that this notion of Christus Victor, while it does not encompass the whole of the teaching of Irenaeus on salvation, "is the most vital and constructive element."¹⁹⁶ The final consummation, the ultimate goal belongs to this victorious Christ who has struggled and conquered all the forces of bondage. This conveys the basic thought of Adversus Haereses, and Gustaf Aulén seeks to follow faithfully in the same direction by recapturing and reinvigorating the spirit of Irenaeus.